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Lupine Sensibilities: Dynamically Embodied Inter-subjectivity Between Humans and Refugee Wolves

Austin D. Hoffman

Introduction: The Transformative Potential of Wolf Greetings

One by one, the students steadily marched single file through the wooden gate as I held it open for them. Most kept their chins up and eyes fixed squarely in front of them, as they were instructed to do. Some, however, could not help but sneak a furtive glance to their right to watch the creatures as they bounded down the hillside to greet the human delegation. Before these bipedal visitors could even find their seats, the wolves were upon them.

This particular group of humans was from United World College, an international school that takes its students off the beaten path for service-learning trips with a focus on social change and experiential learning.¹ The majority of the students were originally from urban metropolises—New York, San Francisco, London, Delhi, São Paulo, Tokyo—and were quite out of their element in a remote mountain eco-village for a whole weekend alongside thirty-some feral canines.

One girl in the group was from Pakistan, and when we were doing introductions earlier that day, she candidly admitted that she was quite afraid of dogs, let alone wolves. In Pakistan and India, it is not uncommon for people to be attacked by wild dogs that live on the refuse of burgeoning megacities like Karachi and Kozhikode.² During our visit, most of her classmates were desperate for attention from the wolves and wolf-dogs, some even attempting to get the coveted “wolf selfie” to post on their Facebook or Instagram account (a stunt we advise



Figure 1 Zeab is a nine-year-old pure Canadian gray wolf. Unlike most adult male wolves he has an incredibly low flight-reflex and is quite curious about humans. Pictured behind him is Abraham (Abe), a twelve-year-old low-content wolf-busky cross and Zeab's foster-father. Photo courtesy of Jenny Thompson, July 2017.

against, since more than one cellphone has become a wolf chew toy); but she just meekly observed, trying not to give the pack any reason to approach. I walked over and knelt down next to her. “Do you want to try and meet one of them?” I asked. Anxiety flashed across her face for an instant before she composed herself. “Um, yeah sure,” she replied shyly. “Okay, if you’re comfortable, just stand up, walk confidently, and go sit down by that lower log,” I pointed down the hill three or four yards away as I gave her instructions. She scanned the terrain and pointed to where she thought I was referring: “You mean right there?” I nodded. “Yes, right down there to the right of the big tree.” After a little hesitation, she stood up and stiffly walked to the indicated spot. Almost instantaneously, her movement caught the attention of Zeab, a male Canadian gray wolf, by far the largest of the pack (Figure 1). He excitedly trotted over and gently pressed his nose against hers, and thoroughly sniffed her face and hair for investigative purposes. To the delight of everyone, she showed no fear. In fact, a smile began to slowly spread across her face as she reached out and began scratching Zeab on his chin and chest as if they were already well acquainted. For those of us who lived and worked alongside these animals, it was a relatively common occurrence to watch a 120-pound wolf that possessed the jaw strength to snap through a femur grin with delight as the

fingers of a comparatively tiny human massaged behind his ears. Most first-time visitors to the sanctuary, however, are utterly incredulous when they see these playful interactions between humans and apex predators.

I watched contentedly from across the enclosure, knowing that I had gauged the situation appropriately and done my job well. An instructor from United World College turned around, mouth agape, and gave me a look of shock and awe. “I can’t believe she was face-to-face with that wolf! She was so nervous about this before we came here!” he exclaimed after the session ended. “That experience is going to change her forever.”

This is just one salient example, among countless others, of embodied wolf-human interactions that I have participated in or been witness to at Mission: Wolf (M:W), a wildlife sanctuary for rescued wolves and wolf-dog crosses. While not all visitors to the sanctuary are as profoundly affected by meeting a wolf as the Pakistani girl at the center of this vignette, I cannot overstate the transformative potential of these interspecies encounters, however brief they may be. It is also crucial to note that such connections do not just serve the whimsical fantasies of ecotourists and the agendas of posh alternative schools. For many human members of the M:W community, these connections served as the bedrock of deeply complex and emotionally nuanced interspecies relationships and trans-species identities. The purpose of this essay is to understand and articulate the pedagogical and embodied dimensions of these processes.

I first contextualize the site of these interactions through a brief overview of the little-known practice of wolf and wolf-dog breeding in the United States and Canada, and how sanctuaries like M:W emerged in response to it. Throughout the essay I also discuss the educational philosophy and pedagogies of M:W and how they are used alongside embodied interspecies communications to illustrate lessons about wolves and wildlife ecology. Some of this contextual information may seem excessive or irrelevant, but having an understanding of the preconceived notions, anthropomorphic projections, and stigmas that humans bring to bear on their encounters with these canines allows us to better analyze these multispecies communicative practices. After providing historical and theoretical context, the majority of this essay attends to the minute and intricate details of the human-wolf interactions themselves. I use the anthropological paradigm of dynamic embodiment as articulated by Brenda Farnell and Charles Varela, as well as (re)formulations of Merleau-Pontian phenomenology and Peircian semiotics, to describe how deictic bodily orchestration and spatial orientation are used to facilitate intersubjective understanding across species lines.³ In doing so I also borrow, with some qualifications, from Kenneth Shapiro’s tripartite methodology of understanding

animals through kinesthetic empathy, social constructions, and individual histories.⁴

The French existentialist Maurice Merleau-Ponty frequently drew from studies of animal communication to theorize about human perception in his early works such as *The Structure of Behavior* and in his magnum opus *Phenomenology of Perception*.⁵ Although he did often refrain to a tacit species hierarchy of “higher” and “lower” animals, near the end of his life he contradicted his earlier ideas as he began to critically interrogate the arbitrary barriers between humanity and nature. He moved away from anthropocentrism and toward a decentering of the human, ultimately suggesting a social field or milieu in which human consciousness necessarily unfolds in dialectical relationships with nonhuman forms of consciousness. In the *Course Notes on Nature*, Merleau-Ponty goes so far as to equate human and nonhuman sociality by saying that “we can speak in a valid way of an animal culture.”⁶ These inchoate ideas reach their most refined form in his unfinished work, *The Visible and the Invisible*.⁷ Louis Westling says it is here that Merleau-Ponty outlines “a horizontal kinship between humans and other animals . . . [that is] congruent with evolutionary biology and ecological thought.”⁸ Other scholars, such as Brett Buchanan and Kelly Oliver, join Westling in suggesting that this is precisely what Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “the flesh of the world” was meant to accomplish by serving as a theoretical window into the coconstitutive, intercorporeal nature of all life.⁹

There are, however, important qualifications that should be made in resurrecting the concept of the flesh. Merleau-Ponty’s brand of existentialism takes the vital step of situating the moving body as the locus of social action in a refutation of Cartesian dualisms, which posit the body as an automaton that simply houses the mind. Farnell points out that in his opposition to Descartes, Merleau-Ponty commits an equally reductionist error by “[swinging] the pendulum as far as possible in the other direction . . . [relocating] an equally ambiguous notion of agency in the body.”¹⁰ Agency thus remains a ghost. In other words, Merleau-Ponty turns the “lived body” or “flesh” into a reified concept—much like Pierre Bourdieu’s “habitus” or Sigmund Freud’s “unconscious”—which locates causation and agency in the mere fact of embodiment and not in *persons* themselves. The reality is that “neither minds nor bodies intend, only *people* do, because as embodied persons they are causally empowered to engage in social and reflexive commentary with the primary resources of vocal and kinetic systems of semiosis provided by their cultural ways of being human.”¹¹

As Farnell and Varela explain, a resolution to this epistemological impasse can be found in Rom Harré’s theory of causal powers, in which “the natural powers for agency grounded in the unique structure of the human organism make

possible the realization of personal powers that are grounded in, and thus afforded by, social life.”¹² By returning agency to persons, this view avoids the overly deterministic aspects of Merleau-Ponty’s thought while retaining the radical potential of an embodied consciousness that exists in continuity with the other-than-human world.¹³ In his zealous rejection of positivism, Merleau-Ponty verges on some of the same fallacies he set out to transcend. Had the scientifically grounded resources of new realism been available to him, he may have been better able to articulate the fascinating conclusions he was working toward in *The Visible and the Invisible*, which anticipated much of the contemporary work in human-animal studies. Farnell and Varela’s version of dynamic embodiment and Harré’s theory were focused on human movement and agency, but I argue that their views can logically be extended to the realm of the nonhuman quite easily, thus allowing us to discuss the unique structures of other species and the varying forms of agency they allow.

Ethnographic vignettes of interspecies communications, such as the one that opened this essay, function as units of analysis for these theoretical orientations. The primary source of this data is autoethnographic and based on my time as the education coordinator at M:W from 2016 to 2018. During this time, I lived on-site at the sanctuary and was obligated to observe, interpret, and speak about captive wolf and wolf-dog social dynamics to the public almost daily. Part of my responsibilities involved collaborating with other staff members to help revamp the educational programming at the sanctuary. A major component of this was cofacilitating wolf-human interactions and the flow of bodily movement within wolf enclosures, so I have intimate knowledge of this multispecies practice. All this being said, I acknowledge that I am by no means an expert in zoology, wolf biology, predator ecology, or any related field. I respect the experts in these arenas and have learned a great deal from them. At the same time, I recognize that these scientific fields are generally based in positivist philosophy and sometimes imply that they have ascended to some epistemological plane of detached and pure objectivity.¹⁴ I echo the concerns of Donna Haraway, Karen Warren, Bruno Latour, and other posthuman and feminist scholars, and am highly critical of knowledge claims that emanate from a disembodied “view from nowhere.”¹⁵ My hope is that the perspective of an anthropologist who is taking a realist approach may offer valuable alternative interpretations.

There is a growing body of literature in the field of environmental education that draws from the phenomenological tradition in theorizing about human-animal interactions. I am inspired by the eco-phenomenology of Phillip G. Payne and aim here to further an educational pedagogy of intercorporeal relations and to conceptualize M:W as “an active experiential and existential site of and for inquiry in and with various natures and environments.”¹⁶ From the animal welfarist

perspective, some work has also been done about how these interactions occur in the contexts of zoos and wildlife sanctuaries, and how they can be mutually enriching for non/humans; Lindsey Mehrkam, Nicolle Verdi, and Clive Wynne have specifically studied captive wolves and wolf-dogs in this regard.¹⁷ Holding all these schools of thought in mind, this essay lies at the four-way intersection of human-animal studies (HAS), anthropological methodology, environmental education, and phenomenology. More specifically, I endeavor to bring the anthropological framework of dynamic embodiment—which draws heavily from phenomenology but has been largely humancentric—firmly into conversation with these other intellectual genealogies. I also feel that wild animals are still underrepresented in HAS, with much scholarship employing these methodologies being focused on domestic animals. To recap, the purpose of this essay is to use the theoretical tools listed above to analyze multimodal techniques such as speech, gesture, gaze, body postures, and movement that make intersubjective connections between humans and wild or feral animals possible, and ultimately, as the philosopher David Dillard-Wright says, “reveal the ways in which human embodiment connects with other forms of embodiment in the production of meaning.”¹⁸

The Wolf-Dog Phenomenon and the Sanctuary Economy

Few animals have captivated the human imagination like the wolf. Its image evokes a gamut of emotions ranging from fear and hatred to reverence and love. How these emotions take shape is, however, dependent on many sociocultural and politico-economic factors. For example, Ray Pierotti and Brandy Fogg recount how most of the Indigenous plains nations of North America “have stories characterizing wolves as guides, protectors, or entities that directly taught or showed humans how to hunt, creating reciprocal relationships in which each species provided food for the other or shared food.”¹⁹ When this is juxtaposed with European views, as exhaustively detailed by Jon Coleman and Michael Robinson, the secular threat wolves posed to farmers and ranchers was coupled with a Christian mythology rife with pastoral imagery.²⁰ In the Bible, the wilderness is defined as a godless place, and many of its denizens were considered demonic entities, none more so than the wolf, who was “the Devil in disguise.”²¹ Colonial governments and economies began to incentivize the extermination of wolves by paying bounties for their pelts and heads. With the founding of the United States, wolves were seen as an impediment to progress and manifest destiny, and the brutal extirpation of the species was federalized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The gray wolf was nearly extinct in the contiguous states by 1970.

This legacy in many ways still influences current politics of wildlife biology and management, governmental bureaucracies, science and technology, and the popular cultural conceptions of animals constructed via mythology, folklore, literature, and media. All these communicative events, even seemingly innocuous ones like the fairy tales of Little Red Riding Hood or the Three Little Pigs, circulate to produce intertexts, and thus discourses about the wolf and other charismatic megafauna that shape public perceptions across spatiotemporal envelopes.²²

Such discourses have played a significant role in what to me is an unbelievably ironic turn of events in the past forty to fifty years. In 1973 wolves were designated as an endangered species, and conservation efforts began to prevent their demise. This culminated with the US Fish and Wildlife Service's reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone National Park in 1995, where they now thrive.²³ Grassroots support for wolf conservation was gained largely by deliberately undoing many of the predominant tropes and myths about the animal. The rehabilitation of the wolf in popular culture mirrors the rehabilitation of the concept of wildness at large in the American imaginary, as discussed by the ecofeminist Carolyn Merchant.²⁴ Whereas the colonists viewed wild nature as a godless place full of darkness and savagery, the romantic writings of early environmental thinkers and naturalists like Henry David Thoreau and John Muir helped transform it into the epitome of the sublime and the pure.

There is an incredibly understudied aspect to this narrative reclamation and rehabilitation of the wolf's public image, which is that Americans have begun to breed and sell wolves and wolf-dog crosses, commonly known as "hybrids," in captivity. In part, this was done by rogue environmentalists and animal rights activists in the 1960s and 1970s who, fearing the wolf's impending extinction, bred wolves and dogs together in hopes of preserving "pure" genetic material by cloaking it through the facade of domesticity.²⁵ That being said, the majority of captive wolf-dogs in America today are bred by humans who are taking advantage of uniquely permissive and vague laws and capitalizing on the animal's mystique by selling them for profit.²⁶

As the reader may infer, keeping wild animals as pets is generally a bad idea. If born in captivity, these wolves usually cannot be reintroduced to their natural habitats; they never learned how to hunt or socialize in a wild wolf pack and are entirely "habituated" to humans and dependent on them for food. Most of these animals are dead by the age of two or three, as their owners quickly realize their grave mistake or simply tire of attempting to tame them. They are taken to shelters and killed, or escape from their owner's homes and are shot or starve to death. Haraway has briefly written on the liminality of the wolf-dog in the case of South Africa; even though they were originally bred to serve the machinations of

apartheid, wolf-dogs were ultimately rendered “both epidemiologically and genetically categorically ‘impure,’ [they] enter the cultural category of the disposable ‘homeless.’”²⁷ There is little to no concrete data on wolf-dog populations. The naturalist Robert Busch, referencing the Humane Society of the United States, claims that there were well over two hundred thousand in America in 2007.²⁸ From my time working in wolf and wolf-dog rescue, my intuition tells me this is an extremely conservative estimate. Regardless, in response to the licit and illicit breeding and selling of these canines, a niche rescue industry has emerged, and M:W is one such space of refuge.

M:W is an off-grid, solar-powered nature sanctuary run primarily by a staff of live-in volunteers and interns who refer to themselves simply as “caretakers” rather than employees or staff (this is an intentional discursive shift that indexes a moral obligation or duty to the wolves and land the sanctuary cares for). It is a nonprofit organization that has been open to the public since 1988 and hosts thousands of visitors and dozens of service-learning groups each year. The canine residents are generally rescued or surrendered from the exotic pet trade, but they also come from defunct zoos and safari parks, and some even from the film industry. Sanctuary residents are a “pure” subspecies of the gray wolf, as well as many wolf-dog crosses. M:W’s educational program is based on a philosophy of lived-experience, which is foregrounded in the organization’s publications and website: “We connect people with nature using hands-on experiential education. Through volunteer internships and our education programs, we inspire individuals to become stewards of the Earth.”²⁹ In practice, this means allowing the public to directly observe resident canines by taking a tour of the sanctuary or by participating in a service project. At designated times, there is also the prospect of facilitated interaction with the most socialized resident canines, otherwise known as the “ambassadors,” which I expound on below.

The information in this section serves to show how wolves are alternately viewed as vicious and aggressive creatures, or as noble, metaphysically powerful “spirit animals” that help one commune with the natural world. These romanticizations and fetishizations of “the wild,” distortions of Native American cosmologies, and the intense American affinity for domestic dogs have led to the high demand for wolf-dogs as pets.³⁰ As a social hybrid species existing in the space between wildness and domesticity, between “savagery” and civilization, the wolf-dog unsettles and problematizes the pervasive nature-culture dichotomy—yet another outgrowth of Cartesian logics. These dualisms and anthropomorphic projections determine how humans mis-/recognize wolves, and other animals, as subjects. These projections emanate from complexly imbricated sociocultural, historical, environmental and political dynamics, which impinge on the qualitative

aspects of the multispecies community and relationships at M:W. I now show how these dynamics operate and are put into practice during wolf-human interactions at the sanctuary.

Multimodal Embodied Praxis of Wolf-Human Interactions

Many wolf sanctuaries and educational centers have something akin to ambassador packs, consisting of canines that are uniquely social with humans and who gain enrichment from interspecies interactions with them. In the case of M:W's long-running ambassador program, these interactive public events usually took place in high school and university auditoriums, natural history museums, state parks, and so on. During my tenure at M:W, the ambassador program did not travel outside the state of Colorado due to the elderly age of some of the canines. Instead, the organization decided to shift to on-site ambassador events, which allowed visitors to observe and interact with the animals up close, should the animals choose to do so.

This event, which we titled a “wolf behavioral session,” can be seen as a complex semiotic process or, in the words of Susan Laird and Kristen Holzer, as a process of *befriending* in practice, of “[discerning] the apparent possibilities, limitations, and best practices of friendliness in such interspecies encounters.”³¹ In describing this, I use the paradigm of dynamic embodiment in an effort to steer clear of Western dualisms that bifurcate linguistic and bodily forms of communication. I again borrow from Farnell in using the terms *vocal signs* and *action signs* from this point on, rather than the traditional “speech” and “gesture.” As she elaborates, “This shift in terminology places both modalities on a more equal footing as two different types of semiotic resources equally available to linguistically capable, embodied agents.”³² Throughout this section I extend theories of dynamic embodiment into the realm of nonhuman animals by applying Dillard-Wright's iteration of phenomenology in Merleau-Ponty's later works and Eduardo Kohn's conception of semiotics.³³

Jo Lee and Tim Ingold claim that “we cannot expect to walk into other people's worlds, and expect thereby to participate in them.”³⁴ Similarly, I believe that we, as humans, cannot expect to simply walk into the worlds of nonhuman peoples and meaningfully participate in them either. This is why the wolf behavioral session is prefaced by a mandatory instructional talk (usually referred to by caretakers as “the wolf talk”) led by the sanctuary director or a senior staff member. Like the antecedent educational tour, the content of this talk is highly variable depending on the composition of visitors. While the main objective of this is to

provide people with the information necessary for a safe, and ideally fulfilling, interaction with the ambassador wolves, it is also loosely designed to pedagogically reinforce educational talking points of the organization and to assess the relative “maturity” levels of younger participants. Unlike most wolves who flee at the sight of anything bipedal, the ambassador pack is oddly curious about humans. We attributed this partly to the fact that the ambassadors had lived almost the entirety of their lives at the sanctuary, and to our knowledge were not subject to abuse or maltreatment prior to their arrival.

To create an environment where humans and wolves can have positive, nonthreatening interactions, you have to try and teach humans to “think” like a wolf. Indeed, a common adage among M:W community members is “we don’t train the wolves, we train the people.” This may sound like an utter impossibility, but I conceive it as similar to taking an emic approach to studying another human culture, in the sense of trying to take the perspective of the subject or “other.” The challenge here, of course, is that the other is from a completely different species. In essence, this is a process of pushing against the boundaries of the body in terms of its sensorial capacities in an effort to interpret the material world from the subjectivity of a wolf. Put differently, it is an attempt to use the body to take the perspective of what Thomas Csordas has termed “other myselfes.”³⁵ This process of trans-species emulation is necessarily imperfect, but this approach to wolf-human communication has been largely successful—perhaps because it is, as Haraway suggests, a way to encourage visitors to look at the world *with* the wolves, rather than *at* them.³⁶ More pragmatically speaking, this means asking humans to recognize and reassess their inculcated and taken-for-granted habitual actions. Farnell urges us that these must “take center stage instead of remaining out of awareness,” as they usually do.³⁷ The instructional talk helps visitors understand how these unconsciously patterned humanoid bodily movements are interpreted by wolf interlocutors, as well as translate the meanings of wolf bodily communications and action signs in a way that is palatable to an uninformed human audience. Similarly, one of M:W’s directors, Tracy Ane Brooks, has written on the concept of “mirroring and mimicry” when working with canines and equines; to communicate effectively with them, one must adopt their behaviors “in a modified, two-legged way.”³⁸

In many respects this is akin to learning a new language. As Drid Williams explains, when you hear a language being spoken that you do not know, “the sounds themselves are perceived, but the social facts remain unperceived because the associational links for the linguistic signs are simply not there.”³⁹ So too is the case with learning wolf “language.” The task of the M:W caretakers is to establish associational links between canid bodily signs and their corresponding

social meanings. To again quote Dillard-Wright, this is not an attempt to collapse the considerable differences between human and wolf communicative processes; rather, it is to say that “animal meaning, like human meaning [is] essentially gestural, [and] consists in the style of comportment unique to each species.”⁴⁰ The question of whether nonhumans have language is contested, but it is not a point I wish to belabor here, other than to say that the claim that only human beings have language has historically been a key mechanism through which anthropocentrism perpetuates itself. Jacques Derrida has famously written on language and the animal question, and others have taken up the issue such as Nina Varsava.⁴¹

This exercise in teaching a type of affective interspecies-intersubjectivity is accomplished partly through the mutual elaboration of vocal signs and action signs. The caretaker will verbalize instructions while displaying how to enact or embody them; these “visual-kinetic signs,” Farnell says, “do not necessarily combine to form utterances that could stand alone, [but] work with the vocal components to create and communicate meaning.”⁴² Below I have enumerated some of the fundamental lessons of bodily comportment during a wolf behavioral session at M:W to help illustrate this concept.

1. Do not give attention to the animals until you are seated. Members of a wolf pack usually greet each other face-to-face; if you are standing, the wolf may attempt to attain eye level with you by jumping up onto you, which could cause injury (especially to people of smaller stature).
2. When walking into a wolf enclosure, stand erect and have confident body posture; some visitors, particularly men, attempt to hunch over in an effort to make themselves seem smaller and less threatening to the wolves. However, this hunched posture is actually *more* threatening to them, as it simulates predatory “stalking” behavior.
3. Once seated, do not move unless instructed to do so. Since body movement and positioning speaks volumes to wolves, even slight gesticulations can drastically impact the quality of an interaction. Even when highly socialized, most wolves are suspicious of humans, and it only takes one mistake to cause them to retreat in fear.
4. Be aware of where *all* the animals are at *all* times.
5. When approached by a canine, bare teeth and keep eyes open in order to reciprocate the wolf greeting. Wolves greet each other through eye contact, sniffing noses, smelling teeth, and touching or licking muzzles. Try to resist the urge you have to pull your face away from the wolf when it attempts to greet you. To them, this is tantamount to rejecting their greeting, which may cause confusion or hurt their feelings.

6. When approached by multiple canines, you must give equal attention to each of them to avoid jealous intraspecies feuding, which is rare among the ambassadors, but possible. If approached by two canines, offer a hand to each; if approached by three, offer a hand to each and offer your face to the third.
7. “Mirror” the animal’s energy. If they seem apprehensive or cautious, do not be overly excited or playful, as it may scare them. In contrast, if the animal is feeling outgoing, do not be too rigid or reserved as it may confuse or bore them.

To communicate points one and two, for example, the caretaker will say “when we go in, make sure you are standing up straight and walking with confidence” while enacting this instruction through their own body posture. They will also often demonstrate the incorrect posture by enacting a sluggish or hunched-over position. In explaining points five and six, the caretaker may say “when the wolf comes up to you, they want to give you a greeting, and all that means is they want to look into your eyes and smell your nose and teeth.” This process is often equated to a human greeting by likening it to the common American/Western practice of the handshake, by saying “humans shake hands when we meet, the wolves sniff noses and teeth.” Subsequently, the caretaker will open their eyes wide, bare their teeth, and lean forward slightly; the caretaker’s words and gestures, the verbal signs and action signs, are mutually elaborating. Some caretakers will also use their hand to pantomime the relative position of the wolf’s head during a greeting by keeping their palm flat and contorting their thumb in a manner that almost looks like a shadow-puppet configuration. Williams notes that “taxonomies of the body and their attending concepts are vital to translations of gestures”; this is demonstrated by the handshake, as the human greeting technique is translated into its wolf correlate.⁴³ Farnell again corroborates this by showing how body movements or action signs are “co-expressive—working in conjunction with vocal signs so that the two modalities create a visual-vocal gestalt in performance.”⁴⁴ In all these instances we see carefully crafted tactics used to organize a perceptual field and create an intersubjective phenomenological bridge between species; as Charles Goodwin puts it, “talk and image mutually enhance each other [creating] a demonstration that is greater than the sum of its parts.”⁴⁵

The wolf ambassador enclosure is roughly an acre and a half in size and is bisected by a fence with gates that can be opened and closed to control the animal’s access. The smaller section of the enclosure, adjacent to the sanctuary tour path, is landscaped specifically for the purposes of the wolf behavioral sessions. M:W



Figure 2 Maggie (Maggie), a fifteen-year-old Arctic wolf-cross sniffs the outstretched hand of a guest to her enclosure. Maggie would usually repeat this process for all the visitors, bestowing kisses on the lucky ones. Along with Abraham, Maggie led M:W's ambassador program for over a decade until her passing in summer 2017. Photo courtesy of Elisa Behzadi, May 2017.

staff installed seating logs in tiers that allow for nearly a hundred people to enter the enclosure at one time. While there are sometimes spontaneous interactions between wolves and caretakers or service groups, which I describe later, a wolf behavioral session is generally a highly orchestrated event, and its relative success depends heavily on the coordination of staff members and their attunement to canid bodily communication and emotional states. Drawing from the work of William Hanks, the wolf enclosure, and the non/human actors within it, can be seen as an actional field where bodies are used in deictic indexical reference in order for communications to succeed.⁴⁶ This approach also accounts for the vital importance of the human “kinesphere,” outlined by Williams, or bodily axes (up/down, left/right, front/back) and the caretaker’s use of words like *here*, *there*, *that*, and *this* to denote zones of proximity or distance within an intersubjective performance space and facilitate interactions.⁴⁷

Upon completion of the wolf talk, visitors form a single-file line and enter the enclosure through a narrow wooden gate. Caretakers then guide them onto the logs, and many people are immediately greeted by the more social members of the ambassador pack. Visitors are also periodically directed to move to what caretakers call the “greeting log,” which is positioned parallel along the fence line and next to

an access gate for the wolves. This log is strategically placed away from other seating areas and near the wolves' "comfort zone" in order to create a nonthreatening space for the more timid animals to greet visitors. I call it a comfort zone because the wolves can easily retreat if they feel threatened or overly stimulated, and it is under a tree that provides shade for the wolves, who are prone to overheating in Colorado's high-desert environment. In any given behavioral session, there are multiple co-occurring intra- and interspecies interactions and semiotic events. The intractable nature of the session makes it difficult to describe, but it might be likened to a (feral) cocktail party where people form niches of conversation that gradually grow, shift, dissolve, morph, and materialize again elsewhere (Figure 2).

During the behavioral session, there is an almost constant communicative interplay occurring between three specific caretakers, whom for the purposes of this analysis I have termed "coach," "conductor," and "translator." The role of the coach, who is seated near the wolf access gate, is to help usher people to the greeting log and direct them where exactly to sit. The movement to the comfort zone stimulates the wolves' interest in the visitor, and the coach helps remind visitors of proper embodied praxis and wolf mannerisms during the interaction. The coach works in tandem with the conductor, a role I occupied at M:W, who is tasked with moving visitors through deictic instructions to different seating logs around the enclosure in order to facilitate a greeting with the wolves. Finally, the translator functions to continually interpret the wolf pack's actions for visitors by incorporating prior information from the educational tour and wolf talk, thus further magnifying the salience of events and establishing associational links. They narrate both intra- and interspecies interactions, and connect the observed behaviors to larger concepts about wolf and wildlife ecology. They also use what Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall have termed "tactics of intersubjectivity" to relate wolf pack dynamics to recognizable human behaviors.⁴⁸ Such tactics are effective because, again drawing from Dillard-Wright, they are based on the tacit (but often unacknowledged) understanding that "when humans encounter other species, they do not approach something altogether alien, they recognize in these 'others' features that are already familiar."⁴⁹ All these roles necessitate an acute awareness of the wolfs' methods of bodily communication, a continual evaluation of their level of comfort, and anticipation of their future movements. This mode of awareness, what I call a lupine sensibility, is a feral reformulation of Shapiro's posture of kinesthetic empathy, "through which [one] attempts to directly sense the motor intention or attitude or project of the animal," which I explain in detail in the following section.⁵⁰ These roles also entail evaluating the humans moving around the enclosure using the same criteria and determining if their bodily comportment or "performances" of wolfness will be perceived as friendly or threatening by the ambassadors. Other

caretakers are stationed incrementally around the enclosure, usually next to small children or elderly visitors who might need assistance during the greeting process. A number of factors influence the minutiae of these interactions, some of which include the following.

The Social Constructions of Wolves

The aforementioned stereotypes and stigmas of wild wolves occasionally affect the way humans interact with captive wolves during these behavioral sessions. Most often this occurs when a wolf attempts to greet humans by sniffing their face or licking their teeth. Some humans, despite being specifically instructed to resist this urge, begin to pull their face away in fright when a wolf approaches them. This usually causes the wolf to try even harder to initiate the greeting; they may even begin to crawl up on the human's lap in an effort to make eye contact and sniff the face. The worst reaction I have seen to one of these greeting attempts was when a young man leapt up from his seat as Abraham (Abe) the wolf-dog jovially approached him, and the man sidled backward on the ground until he was cowering against the fence, convinced that the wolf was trying to eat him! All the while, Abe interpreted his actions as playful, which caused him to pursue his reluctant new friend with more vigor. This communicative misrecognition on the part of both human and canine caused quite a scene until we were able to intervene and de-escalate the situation. Conversely, the fetishization of wolves as "spirit-animals" can cause some humans to try excessively hard to initiate an interaction with them. Some attempt to grasp at wolves as they walk by, or brazen visitors will even get up from their seats, flouting all conventions, and try to approach them. This unsolicited pressure often causes the wolves to flee. Wolves also seem to sense when humans want to contrive a greeting and tend to avoid these individuals entirely.

Wolf Pack Dynamics

It behooves the human interlocutor to be aware of the specific social dynamics at play within any given wolf pack. In the case of the ambassador pack, which at the time of this writing comprises three members, there is a deceptively simple hierarchy at work during behavioral sessions. Although Zeab is a pure wolf, and the largest in the trio, he is second in rank to Abraham, a low-content wolf-husky cross. Most visitors are shocked to learn this, as they assume that pure wolves are



Figure 3 Three-month-old pure wolf puppy Saurya (Shub-rye-ub) displays cautious body posture during a rainy behavioral session. As she matured, Saurya would choose to exit the ambassador program in favor of a living situation where she was not exposed to large crowds of humans. Most resident wolves at M:W choose this route. Meanwhile, foster-sister Nashira, pictured behind her, continues to enjoy human interaction in the ambassador pack. Photo courtesy of Jenny Thompson, July 2017.

automatically dominant over wolf-dogs. This is not necessarily the case, as the pack hierarchy establishes itself by virtue of the particular temperaments of the wolves and how these personalities clash or coalesce. The third member of the pack is Nashira, a yearling high-content wolf-shepherd cross. Being the lone female in the pack, she considers herself the “alpha” (although this is not technically the correct term) by default, since wolves generally only challenge other pack members within the same sex for dominance and breeding rights. Her age also plays a role; as the youngest, she is sometimes subject to discipline from the older pack members when she acts out of turn. These relationships influence wolf-human interactions. For example, if Zeab is greeting a human, he will often acquiesce and step aside if Abe approaches. An awareness of these relationships becomes more crucial when interacting with wolves who are actively vying for dominance with each other or who are strongly bonded with and possessive over particular humans.

Wolf Content or “Hybridity”

While not a totalizing force, the breeding or genealogy of the canines does seem to influence their propensity to seek human contact. Generally, wolf-dogs are less apprehensive around humans than pure wolves. Upon even a cursory observation of captive wolves versus wolf-dogs, you can see that wolves remain constantly vigilant of where human visitors are in their enclosures, and will not entirely relax until they have exited (Figure 3), whereas wolf-dogs will turn their backs to visitors, and some even lie down next to them. Wolves also generally tire of human interaction much quicker than wolf-dogs. Zeab, for instance, will usually retreat to his den after he has cordially greeted all new visitors to his domain. As Brooks says, “The wolves had more important things to do . . . [they] had no need to just hang around soliciting attention or trying to be petted like a dog.”⁵¹ In contrast, Abe and Nashira seem to enjoy being in the presence of humans for extended periods; they may repeat the greeting process multiple times before becoming weary of the attention.

Wolf Diets

The wolves’ diets also affect their dispositions toward humans. At M:W, the canines are fed on a feast-famine cycle, which mimics the frequency that wolves eat in the wild (only once or twice a week). Wild wolves hunt their prey for several days, make a kill, gorge themselves on the carcass, and are usually less active for the next day or two as they digest. After being fed, the wolves at M:W spend most of the following day in a food-induced stupor, sleeping off their feast of raw meat, hide, bone marrow, and organs, and are reluctant to host visitors.

Environment

There are many simple, taken-for-granted things that affect interactions such as the weather, humidity, sun exposure, time of day, and so on. Being covered in fur and unable to perspire, wolves are more reticent to interact on hot days and prefer to remain in the shade. It is a common misconception that wolves are nocturnal animals, but they are actually crepuscular, meaning they are most active during dawn and dusk. Behavioral sessions during sunrises or sunsets usually result in exceptionally long and lively interactions, as the wolves are full of energy. I recall a particularly hot day in the summer of 2017 when the executive director of the

Sierra Club, Michael Brune, was visiting M:W with his kids on a service trip; the ambassadors were lethargic and unwilling to step out of the shade. Kent, the sanctuary director, asked Michael's son to walk through the access gate to the *other* side of the enclosure, a space where usually only caretakers go, and sit under the cover of Zeab's favorite ponderosa pine tree. As the uncertain boy slowly ambled up the hill toward the wolves, I could sense a palpable feeling of anxiety creeping up in his father. "Uh, a—are you *sure* that's safe?" he asked Kent. "Oh yeah, it's no problem," Kent assured Michael. "It's not that they don't want to interact, they just don't want to make the effort to come all the way down here, so we'll meet 'em halfway." Sure enough, when the boy walked under the cool umbrella of the pine tree, Zeab immediately perked up and offered an exuberant greeting, and the dad breathed a sigh of relief. Brune later wrote of this experience, saying, "the connection was instantaneous. Never in [his kid's] lives had they been so close to something so wild, beautiful and mysterious . . . one weekend forged a connection that will last a lifetime."⁵²

To be clear, most public visitors to M:W are made aware of only a few of these factors. But for caretakers, volunteers, and long-term friends of the sanctuary, all of these should be taken into account if one intends to create lasting bonds with the resident animals. I follow the work of Kohn in viewing the multimodal forms of communication in these interactions through Charles Peirce's trichotomy of icon, index, and symbol.⁵³ And, like Kohn's study of the interspecies relationships among the non/humans of the Upper Amazon, the relations between humans and canines at M:W stretch semiotic theory to include symbols beyond anthropocentric worldviews; it offers more compelling evidence that "signs are not exclusively human affairs. All living beings sign."⁵⁴

To further elucidate the semiotic chains being created in the wolf behavioral sessions, one of the caretakers, most often the translator, serves as the linkage or "ground" between the object (the wolf's internal subjective state) and the sign (its bodily externalization of that state) for the interpretant (the visitor or behavioral session participant). The mediating role of the translator allows for what may be opaque nonhuman mannerisms to become legible; it lets the sign be recognized *as* a sign. Once these linkages are firmly established for visitors, then the interactions with the wolves become more replicable and even ritualized; when a participant successfully greets a wolf, it serves as an example for others within the session. For instance, a wolf's ear position indicates its feelings about another member of the pack; ears flattened back against the head indicate playfulness, comfort, or submission, ears perked up and forward mean curiosity, alertness, or dominant posturing. Other action signs may be tail position, height of the head, or vocalizations like whimpering, snarling, or howling.

The human interpretant's body is in turn a sign to the wolf in much the same way. As Stefan Helmreich and Eben Kirksey have noted, nonhumans may also act as anthropologists by studying the actions and mannerisms of humans.⁵⁵ The wolves are not passively acted on in this process. They are also active agents in these interactions; "just as humans inhabit a milieu and take up intentional stances towards objects," says Dillard-Wright, "animal bodies also participate in a dialogical and communicative interplay with their surroundings."⁵⁶ Indeed, it is the voluntary participation of the wolves that allows for this lesson in what Traci Warrentin calls "interspecies etiquette" to occur at all.⁵⁷

Peirce's realist or emergentist approach complements the later thought of Merleau-Ponty quite well, despite the two scholars coming from starkly different philosophical traditions. Kohn points out that, like Merleau-Ponty, Peirce was concerned with "how to imagine a more capacious real that is more true to a naturalistic, nondualistic understanding of the universe."⁵⁸ But while Peircian trichotomies are applicable in various ways to this loose vignette, to truly understand these connections requires us to move beyond classical semiotic theory, toward not just a more expansive view of language that incorporates the dynamism of the moving, as opposed to static, human body but also an explicit inclusion of the movements of nonhuman bodies as bearers of trans-species meaning, which indexes subjectivity. To paraphrase the semiotician Richard Parmentier, in these scenarios the causality between the object and sign is only useful to the interpretant, who is acquainted with the indexical relationship between body "language" and subjective emotional states, and with the iconic relationship between the wolf's bodily expressions and level of relative comfort, curiosity, or stress.⁵⁹ Accepting the veracity of these relationships invites the recognition of the wolf as a social agent capable of novelty, obligating us to move beyond a behavioristic or Pavlovian view of nonhumans as ruled exclusively by base instinct. They become intelligible as subjects. Before moving on, I want to reiterate the disclaimer that the parallels being drawn between humans and canines are not an attempt to ignore species difference or descend into some sort of pseudo-pantheistic primordial ooze that flattens particularities—to do this would be to commit the same logical fallacy as liberal multiculturalism. I do not adhere to the same paradigm of embodiment as Michael Jackson, who implies that the body is a "common ground" that automatically allows entrance into the subjective world of the other.⁶⁰ To the contrary, the widely varying dispositions of M:W's canine residents reinforce the ideas of Suzanne Cataldi, who writes that respecting the dignity of nonhumans means empowering them "to live a life fitted for [their] species-specific nature."⁶¹ Lori Gruen has also written about the "dangers of focusing on sameness" when making a case for animal rights, as this may inadvertently smuggle in certain anthropocentric assumptions,

regardless of intentions.⁶² Indeed, to gain an accurate portrayal of the agentic capacities of an organism is to accurately comprehend its unique biosocial structure. We can, and should, respect the significant differences between humans and wolves while acknowledging that we have much in common with them as physiologically and emotionally complex social animals with similar semiotic capabilities.

I move forward by sharing two vignettes of interactions with feral canines who are considerably less socialized and not as inclined toward humans as the ambassador pack. These vignettes will build on the fundamentals of wolf-human interactions I described by providing more intimate and nuanced accounts of how empathetic intersubjectivity is fostered between species through the medium of the body.

Fostering Intimacy and Understanding with Unsocialized Wolves and Wolf-Dogs

I believe one of the biggest factors enabling violence against nonhuman animals is that we deprive them of history. By this I mean that nonhumans, especially wild animals, are often viewed monolithically. We ignore the fact that species are made up of particular individuals, all of whom have unique dispositions and irreplaceable emotional landscapes. Jane Desmond touches on this in her study of the gruesome everyday violence of roadkill, which humans generally dismiss as an unfortunate but unavoidable consequence of modern life. She asks us to consider the specific history of a hypothetical pair of mated rabbits, one of which has been struck and killed by a vehicle. “Perhaps the dead rabbit,” she wonders:

was the bonded-for-life partner of another rabbit, the latter safe now in the once-shared burrow. Bonded rabbits, we know, maintain their closeness for years and, domesticated or wild, spend hours nestled side by side, an intimacy roadkilling forever interrupts. How long will the surviving member of the pair wait for [their] companion’s return?⁶³

I wish to bring this same sensitivity and thoughtfulness about nonhuman particulars to my analysis of human-wolf interactions, as I believe it is a vital component to their success. Shapiro exemplifies this with his tripartite methodology of interacting with dogs.⁶⁴ First, Shapiro says the investigator must capaciously read popular and scientific literature about the animal under investigation to comprehend its social construction. Second, he says one must “become a historian of the individual animal or animals under study . . . [developing] a biographical

account.”⁶⁵ These studious orientations are meant to inform the final and overarching methodological component, which is the adoption of “an empathic posture in which [one senses] the bodily attitude, stance, and incipient moves of the other.”⁶⁶ It is precisely this sort of posture that the human community at M:W seeks to cultivate among one another as a way to befriend canines and creating mutualistic interspecies relationships.

One salient example of this can be seen through interactions with Farah, a pure Canadian gray wolf female, and the sister to Zeab (Figure 4). In contrast to her comparatively mellow and introverted brother, Farah is incredibly excitable and outgoing. Since puppyhood, she has thrived on human attention. As she matured and became one of the largest females at the sanctuary, her excitable nature eventually became an issue during behavioral sessions. She would exuberantly greet visitors by running toward them and ramming her nose into their faces, showering them with licks and nibbles. This often resulted in bloody noses and fat lips. Of course, when wolves greet each other in the wild, this is entirely normal; they communicate and show affection by running at each other, playfully wrestling, and sometimes lightly chewing on each other’s faces. To the uninformed observer, however, this could easily be interpreted as aggression. Mistranslations of these actions in wolf and wolf-dog pets often lead to deadly consequences—usually for the canine.

Due to her erratic nature, Farah was eventually separated from the ambassador pack and placed in a more secluded part of the sanctuary along with her life partner, Apollo. Although she is no longer visited by the general public, M:W caretakers and volunteers who have developed certain lupine sensibilities can continue to have successful and enriching interactions with her by adapting to her specific styles of communication. Before entering her enclosure, caretakers remove any loose items of clothing or jewelry like hats, necklaces, bandanas, and earrings. Farah has developed quite a mischievous personality over the years and enjoys snatching treasures from unwary guests. I once took part in a visit to Farah’s enclosure during which she deftly lifted the prescription glasses off the face of the person sitting next to me before he could even react! After these items are removed, humans enter in a single-file line in a similar manner to the larger wolf behavioral sessions. Instead of sitting on logs, however, they sit with their backs against the fence so Farah cannot get behind them. This prevents her from crawling over or onto someone’s back in a frenzy of excitement, or from pulling at hair. The key technique for greeting Farah is to be the first to initiate contact by extending a hand to her. The initiation of contact establishes control of the interaction. As her face approaches yours, gently place your hand on her chin and keep it there while she licks you. With the free hand, you can gently scratch Farah on the neck



Figure 4 Farah surveys her large mountainside enclosure from afar. When humans she knows well enter her home, she ecstatically bounds down the hill, ears-pinned back to her head and tail-wagging in a show of joy and friendliness. Photo courtesy of Jenny Thompson, July 2017.

and chest. This seems to have a calming effect on her and prevents any excessive nipping or chewing. This also serves a dual function by providing a safeguard in case the wolf gets too excited. You can position your thumb and index finger near the back of the wolf's jaw, just behind the molars, and if the wolf were to nip or bite, you can roll and pinch their jowls into this gap in the dentition, causing them to release you. I have had to do this on a couple of occasions with a wolf named Daisy, who was playfully (but painfully) pulling at my beard.

Through these bodily techniques crafted specifically for Farah's disposition, she can continue to receive the attention she so craves from humans without accidentally injuring anyone. Such techniques could not have been properly developed without a general understanding of wolf sociality and bodily communication (universal) *and* an awareness of Farah's personality or biographical history (particular), as Shapiro prescribes. Warren's concept of "situated universals" is especially helpful in understanding the dialectics between abstract social constructions and localized individuals; for her, ethical principles and empathetic postures are derived from "historically particular, real-life experiences and practices" that then inform our generalizations.⁶⁷

This method can also be fruitfully applied to wolves that are skittish or fearful of humans in order to better socialize them to a life in captivity. This is

illustrated with the contrasting example of Minigan, a low-content wolf-shepherd cross who was surrendered to M:W after his owner became seriously ill and could not care for him anymore. To our understanding, Minigan was living in a small apartment in Denver, Colorado, and had little human interaction other than with his owner. When he arrived at the sanctuary, he was petrified of strangers. For months, he would not allow any humans to touch him, running as far away as possible and cowering in fear in his enclosure. Over time, Minigan gradually came to trust a select few humans, but still took several weeks to accept the company of strangers. We suspect that part of Minigan's fearfulness is due to him having pan-nus, a degenerative canine eye disease that causes partial or complete blindness. Sometimes it seems Minigan is scared of approaching humans because he cannot identify who they are from a distance.

With Minigan's life history in mind, we adapted to his conduct accordingly. Minigan is wary of large numbers of humans, so we generally only interact with him in small groups. Upon entering his enclosure, he will not approach you like Farah or the ambassador wolves. He needs to vet you first and ensure that you are not a threat. If you attempt to approach Minigan directly, he usually tenses up and runs away immediately. Instead, you can walk at an angle to the left or right of him, and sit down a few yards from his position facing away from him. While walking, you should *not* try to get Minigan's attention or make eye contact with him—this tips your hand and causes him to become suspicious or anxious. The key is to walk nonchalantly, confidently, and fluidly, almost as if you do not notice Minigan's presence at all. After sitting down, remain relaxed and quiet. Listen closely for Minigan's movements; when you hear him arise from his seated position, extend your arm backward, with palm flat and facing upward. If you have moved inconspicuously enough, Minigan will approach you cautiously to sniff and investigate your hand. Once you feel his cold nose on your palm, it is crucial that you keep facing away from him. Eye contact is an intense form of communication to canines, and for Minigan, too much of it too quickly causes him to flee. After he has sniffed you for a few seconds and verified your identity, begin speaking softly to him and offering positive reinforcement, and try to softly scratch his chin with the tips of your fingers. This usually causes Minigan to lower his guard, and he may even move closer to you. Once you are able to reach down to his neck or chest and scratch him, this is a sign that he is calm enough to receive direct eye contact. After this, you can shift your position and slowly move closer to him.

Through these slow, methodical socialization techniques, Minigan has become much more comfortable around groups of humans and less wary of strangers. Depending on Minigan's mood, he will sometimes even allow someone he trusts to put him on a lead and facilitate a greeting with new people, if they fol-



Figure 5 The author (left), who has a close relationship with Minigan, places him on a lead to calm him and to help facilitate a greeting with a stranger, which Minigan graciously accepts. With small groups of visitors, miniature behavioral sessions with Minigan were sometimes conducted to educate about the nuances of mirroring, mimicry, and proper body posture. Photo courtesy of Jenny Thompson, July 2017.

low these steps appropriately (Figure 5). Like the aforementioned example of Farah, this meticulous approach is crafted with a particular nonhuman subject's biographical history and *Umwelt* in mind.⁶⁸ In this case, it takes account of factors such as Minigan's anxiety and poor eyesight. Once he feels safe with someone, Minigan becomes a goofy, loveable wolf-dog who enjoys the company of humans. During his life at the sanctuary, he has taught many caretakers how to understand and work with fearful animals.

Williams claims that "for [actions] to become intelligible, investigators must deal with intentions, beliefs, and contexts."⁶⁹ These vignettes of two feral canines who are highly sensitive, albeit in different ways, provide examples of how such investigations into the other-than-human world might play out. They also show the huge range of possibilities in terms of how humans interpret signs from the canines and vice versa. So while there are recognizable associational links between wolf action signs and subjective states, it is not a mechanistic one-to-one correlation, and it cannot be understood solely by observation. There is considerable creativity in these interspecies semiotic processes; the actions manifest differently depending on the historically particular individual.

Conclusion

In this essay I have attempted to bring two different theoretical schools of thought on the body into conversation, that of dynamic embodiment and that of what might be called human-animal studies or posthumanism.⁷⁰ Both endeavor to resurrect the radical thought of Merleau-Ponty, and while their terminology, means, and goals are different, they arrive at strikingly similar conclusions about embodied consciousness and how space creates intersubjective relations. I have used the wolf behavioral sessions and other unique wolf-human interactions at M:W to illustrate these concepts. In doing so, I have tried to not simply act as a translator between human and nonhuman sociality and cognitive capacities, but also question the entrenched notions of human superiority that have been the source of unfathomable speciesist violence.

This orchestration of canine and human bodies, which I call interspecies choreography—what Haraway would call “co-constitutive naturalcultural dancing”—has in effect become a new pedagogical method at M:W.⁷¹ It is a way of ontologically undoing, albeit temporarily for most, a routinized, inculcated, and historically sedimented human *habitus*, and replacing it with a hyper-embodied and reflexive lupine sensibility, in which the tiniest gesticulation, vocalization, twitch, or glance serve as intensely meaningful multimodal forms of communication. I join Judith Butler in arguing that phenomenology can assist us in reconstructing the sedimented characteristics of the body toward liberatory ends.⁷² These processes not only dispel myths and discourses that justify violence against nonhuman *bodies* but also challenge anthropocentric perceptions of the world and create a space for empathy and solidarity with nonhuman *people*.⁷³

The multispecies community at M:W is not without its contradictions, but it is a site where nonhumans, who would otherwise fall through the considerable cracks and crevasses of the animal welfare-state, can find refuge and *family*. It is a space of hope and resurgence in the dire times of the Anthropocene, where these canines are not denied asylum but, rather, as Leesa Fawcett says, they are accepted and celebrated as “feral creatures of environmental knowledge, creatures of hope and liberatory pedagogy.”⁷⁴

I have focused on the methods by which humans can communicate with captive wolves and wolf-dogs in a more equitable and empathetic way. But as I have alluded to, humans are also changed through enacting these postures. My visceral, embodied relationships with these canines have radically shaped me into a more patient, aware, and confident person. They have reaffirmed both my

personal and scholarly path. They have reminded me, time and again, that there is so much in this world worth fighting for.

* * *

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This essay is dedicated to Magpie and Abraham, two of the most famous, influential and courageous ambassador wolves (in Abe's case wolf-dog) who ever lived. You inspired hundreds of thousands, if not more. Thank you for the love and compassion you showed the world, it was an honor to be one of your caretakers, and to be your kin. Rest in power, Platinum Princess and Sheriff Abe. During the drafting of this essay, the author received support and helpful critiques from Breanna Escamilla, Charlotte Prien, Joseph Coyle, Paul Michael Leonardo Atienza, Lila Ann Dodge, Allie Zachwieja, and Sophie Seidel. Doctors Krystal Smalls, Brenda Farnell, and Jane Desmond have my sincerest thanks and appreciation for their patience and guidance during the development of these ideas. To Jenny Thompson and Elisa Behzadi, thank you for your incredible photos that so accurately depict what I am trying to convey. My thanks to the editorial board of Refract for the opportunity to share this work. Last but far from least, I am forever indebted to my misfit multispecies family unit at Mission: Wolf. Thank you to the caretakers, Tracy, Kent, and Mike, for your teachings and mentorship; thank you to Tricia, Dax, Ari, Sven, Michel, Eric, Kacey, Alyssia, Rachel, and Laura for your passion and dedication to the wolves, and for your companionship. Thank you to all caretakers, past, present, and future; the Mish remembers you! Finally, thank you to every single one of my canine and equine friends and teachers, but especially Talon, Valley Spirit and her kids, Soleil, Nashira, McKinley, Minigan, and Cephira. Sending you bowls of love and gratitude. I miss you dearly.

Notes

¹ See <https://www.uwc.org> for a more comprehensive idea of the London-based United World College (UWC). To my understanding, this trip to the wolf sanctuary was part of one of their “short programmes” meant to engage prospective students.

² Maya Shenoy, “Man’s Worst Enemy: Wild Dogs Terrorize India,” *Newsweek*, September 4, 2016, <https://www.newsweek.com/mans-worst-enemy-wild-dogs-terrorize-india-495167>.

³ Brenda Farnell and Charles R. Varela, “The Second Somatic Revolution,” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 38, no. 3 (2008): 215–40.

⁴ Kenneth J. Shapiro, “Understanding Dogs through Kinesthetic Empathy, Social Construction, and History,” *Anthrozoos* 3, no. 3 (1990): 184–95, <https://doi.org/10.2752/089279390787057540>; see also Shapiro, “A Phenomenological Approach to the Study of Nonhuman Animals,” in *Anthropomorphism, Anecdotes, and Animals*, edited by Robert Mitchell, Nicholas Thompson, and H. Lyn Miles (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 277–95.

⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, translated by Alden L. Fisher (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000); Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).

⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*, translated by Robert Vallier (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 4.

⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

⁸ Louise Westling, *The Logos of the Living World: Merleau-Ponty, Animals, and Language* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 161–62. See also Westling’s 2010 article “Merleau-Ponty’s Human Animality: Intertwining and the Animal Question,” in *Configurations* 18, no. 1-2 (2010): 161–180.

⁹ Kelly Oliver, *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to Be Human* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Brenda Farnell, “Ethno-Graphics and the Moving Body,” *MAN: Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 29, no. 4 (1994): 932.

¹¹ Farnell and Varela, “Second Somatic Revolution,” 221.

¹² Farnell, “Ethno-Graphics and the Moving Body,” 933; Rom Harré, “Persons and Powers,” in *Philosophy in Britain today*, edited by G. Shankar (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

¹³ See Charles R. Varela, “Determinism and the Recovery of Human Agency: The Embodiment of Persons,” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 33, no. 1 (1999): 385–402.

¹⁴ Charles R. Varela, *Science for Humanism: The Recovery of Human Agency* (Oxford: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁵ Donna J. Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99.

¹⁶ Phillip G. Payne, “(Un)timely Ecophenomenological Framings of Environmental Education Research,” in the *International Handbook of Research on Environmental Education*, edited by Robert B. Stevenson et al. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 433.

¹⁷ Anna M. Claxton, “The Potential of the Human-Animal Relationship as Environmental Enrichment for the Welfare of Zoo-Housed Animals,” *Applied Animal Behavior Science* 133, no. 1 (2011): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2011.03.002>; Lindsey R. Mehrkam, Nicolle T. Verdi, and Clive D. L. Wynne, “Human Interaction as Environmental Enrichment for Pair-Housed Wolves and Wolf-Dog Crosses,” *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* 17, no. 1 (2014): 43–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888705.2014.856246>.

¹⁸ David B. Dillard-Wright, *Ark of the Possible: The Animal World in Merleau-Ponty* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 8.

¹⁹ Raymond Pierotti and Brandi R. Fogg, *The First Domestication: How Wolves and Humans Coevolved* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 21.

²⁰ Jon T. Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Michael J. Robinson, *Predatory Bureaucracy: The Extermination of Wolves and the Transformation of the West* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2005).

²¹ Barry H. Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men* (New York: Scribner, 1978), 140.

²² See Michael Silverstein, “Axes of Evals: Token versus Type Interdiscursivity,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (2005): 6–22.

²³ For a closer look at the sociopolitical history and ecological effects of the Northern Rockies reintroduction, see Gary Ferguson and Douglas Smith, *Decade of the Wolf: Returning the Wild to Yellowstone* (Guilford, CT: Lyons, 2012). For a more narrativized rendition of this history, see Nate Blakeslee, *American Wolf: A True Story of Survival and Obsession in the West* (New York: Crown, 2017). Gray wolves were federally reintroduced into Yellowstone National Park and the Frank Church Wilderness of Idaho. In the quarter century since the reintroduction, wolves have caused so-called Trophic Cascades, by contributing to rebalancing the ecosystem by forcing herds of elk and deer to migrate away from overgrazed streambeds,

which in turn allows stands of aspen, willow, cottonwoods, and other forms of vegetation to regenerate. The overall impact wolves have had on the park is still hotly debated by wolf biologists and ecologists. At the time of this writing, wolves are still technically classified as an endangered species, although the Trump administration has been trying to strip them of this status.

²⁴ Carolyn Merchant, *American Environmental History: An Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

²⁵ See Dorothy Prendergast, *The Wolf Hybrid* (Gallup, NM: Rudelhaus Enterprises, 1989); Gordon K. Smith, *Slave to a Pack of Wolves* (Chicago: Adams, 1978). Smith is perhaps the most in/famous and outspoken American wolf-dog advocate in the last half century. He ran a lucrative wolf-dog breeding operation in Iowa. In this book—his only published work—he likens those against wolf-dog hybridization to fascists.

²⁶ Robert H. Busch, *The Wolf Almanac: A Celebration of Wolves and Their World* (Guilford, CT: Lyons, 2007).

²⁷ Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 37. Haraway is referencing Robyn Dixon's 2004 *Los Angeles Times* article about the Tsitsikamma Wolf Sanctuary in southern South Africa (<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2004-oct-17-fg-wolf17-story.html>).

²⁸ Busch, *Wolf Almanac*, 181. I could not find this statistic again during my own internet search.

²⁹ Mission: Wolf, "Mission and Values," accessed April 26, 2019, <https://mission-wolf.org/about-3/>.

³⁰ See Veronique Campion-Vincent, "Native Americans as a Source of Wisdom: History and Analysis of Contemporary Mythology," *Studia Ethnologica Pragensia* 2, no. 1 (2017): 13–29, <http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.desklight-e5b70492-e477-4e33-98c7-9d75227b2405>.

³¹ Susan Laird and Kristen Ogilvie Holzer, "Interspecies Encounters: A Prolegomenon to Educational Thought Experimentation on Befriending Animals," in *The Educational Significance of Human and Non-Human Animal Interactions: Blurring the Species Line*, edited by Suzanne Rice and A. G. Rud (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 156.

³² Brenda Farnell, "Dynamic Embodiment in Assiniboine (Nakota) Storytelling," *Anthropological Linguistics* 44, no. 1 (2002): 39.

³³ Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Dillard-Wright, *Ark of the Possible*. Note, however, that Dillard-Wright defaults to the term *gesture*.

- ³⁴ Jo Lee and Tim Ingold, "Fieldwork on Foot: Perceiving, Routing, Socializing," in *Locating the Field: Space, Place, and Context in Anthropology*, edited by Simon Coleman and Peter Collins (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 67.
- ³⁵ Thomas J. Csordas, "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology," *Ethos* 18, no. 1 (1990): 5–47.
- ³⁶ Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 128.
- ³⁷ Brenda Farnell, *Dynamic Embodiment for Social Theory: 'I Move Therefore I Am'* (London: Routledge, 2012), 210.
- ³⁸ Tracy Ane Brooks, *A Walk in Connection* (Bloomington, IN: Balboa, 2014), 153.
- ³⁹ Drid Williams, "Signifying Bodies, Signifying Acts: New Ways of Thinking about Human Movement," manuscript, *Journal for the Anthropological Study of Human Movement*, 2003, 88.
- ⁴⁰ Dillard-Wright, *Ark of the Possible*, 45.
- ⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); see also Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Nina Varsava, "The Problem of Anthropomorphous Animals: Towards a Posthumanist Ethics," *Society & Animals* 22, no. 1 (2014): 520–36, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685306-12341270>.
- ⁴² Brenda Farnell, "Rethinking Verbal and Non-Verbal in Discursive Performance," *Journal for the Anthropological Society of Human Movement* 13, no. 4 (2005): 213.
- ⁴³ Williams, "Signifying Bodies, Signifying Acts," 14.
- ⁴⁴ Farnell, "Dynamic Embodiment in Assiniboine Storytelling," 59.
- ⁴⁵ Charles Goodwin, "Professional Vision," *American Anthropologist* 96, no. 3 (1994): 621.
- ⁴⁶ William Hanks, *Language and Communicative Practices* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996).
- ⁴⁷ Drid Williams, "Space, Intersubjectivity, and the Conceptual Imperative: Three Ethnographic Cases," in *Human Action Signs in Cultural Context: The Visible and the Invisible in Movement and Dance*, edited by Brenda Farnell (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1995), 44–81.
- ⁴⁸ Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, "Language and Identity," in *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, edited by Alessandro Duranti (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2003), 368–94.
- ⁴⁹ Dillard-Wright, *Ark of the Possible*, 29.
- ⁵⁰ Shapiro, "Understanding Dogs through Kinesthetic Empathy," 186.
- ⁵¹ Brooks, *Walk in Connection*, 34.

- ⁵² Michael Brune, "Harry Potter Can't Compete with the Magic of Wolves," *Sierra: The National Magazine of the Sierra Club*, October 16, 2017, <https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/2017-6-november-december/executive-director/harry-potter-cant-compete-magic-wolves>.
- ⁵³ Kohn, *How Forests Think*; C. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, Vols. 1-6, 1931-1935* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958).
- ⁵⁴ Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 42.
- ⁵⁵ Eben S. Kirksey and Stefan Helmreich, "The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography," *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 4 (2010): 545-76.
- ⁵⁶ Dillard-Wright, *Ark of the Possible*, 92.
- ⁵⁷ Traci Warkentin, "Interspecies Etiquette: An Ethics of Paying Attention to Animals," *Ethics and the Environment* 15, no. 1 (2010): 101-21.
- ⁵⁸ Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 56.
- ⁵⁹ Richard J. Parmentier, *Signs in Society: Studies in Semiotic Anthropology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).
- ⁶⁰ Michael Jackson, "Knowledge of the Body," *Man* 18, no. 2 (1983): 340.
- ⁶¹ Suzanne Cataldi, "Animals and the Concept of Dignity," *Ethics and the Environment* 7, no. 2 (2002): 113-14.
- ⁶² Lori Gruen, *Entangled Empathy: An Alternative Ethic for Our Relationships with Animals* (New York: Lantern Books, 2015), 16.
- ⁶³ Jane C. Desmond, *Displaying Death and Animating Life: Human-Animal Relations in Art, Science, and Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 148.
- ⁶⁴ I am using Shapiro's methods because they apply to interactions with nonhuman animals in general, not because he chooses dogs specifically. Although closely related, forms of dog communication *do not* necessarily translate to wolf communication.
- ⁶⁵ Shapiro, "Understanding Dogs through Kinesthetic Empathy," 186.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 190.
- ⁶⁷ Karen J. Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 114. See also Kelly A. Burns, "Warren's Ecofeminist Ethics and Merleau-Ponty's Body-Subject: Intersections," *Ethics and the Environment* 13, no. 2 (2008): 101-18, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40339161>.
- ⁶⁸ Brett Buchanan, *Onto-Ethologies: The Animal Environments of Uexküll, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008). Buchanan's project is to resurrect the thinking of German biologist Jakob von Uexküll, among others, and his concept of the *Umwelt* (self-world) in relation to

animal studies. Different species perceive and interact with their environments according to their unique biology and the signs that are significant to them within their *Umwelt*. The concept has served as inspiration for the likes of Martin Heidegger, Thomas Sebeok, and Giorgio Agamben.

⁶⁹ Drid Williams, *Anthropology and the Dance: Ten Lectures* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 210.

⁷⁰ See Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009). Here I am following Wolfe's definition of the posthuman project as an explicit decentering and deconstruction of the human in the humanist sense, and an undoing of human-animal binaries. There are, however, alternative interpretations to what posthumanism is. Richard Grusin claims that the posthuman turn implies "a teleology or progress in which we begin with the human and see a transformation from the human to the posthuman, after or beyond the human." In contrast, he says that the "nonhuman turn" insists that the human has *never* been the bounded, stable category it has been construed as, since we as a species are entangled with and reliant on the other-than-human world (Grusin, ed., *The Nonhuman Turn* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015], xi).

⁷¹ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 27.

⁷² Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519–31.

⁷³ See Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (London: Verso, 2017).

⁷⁴ Leesa Fawcett, "Feral Sociality and (Un)Natural Histories: On Nomadic Ethics and Embodied Learning," in *Fields of Green: Restorying Culture, Environment, and Education*, edited by Marcia McKenzie et al. (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton, 2009), 227.